

8. THE OCCURRENCE OF ALBINO AND MELANIC RATS

Mr. Romer's account (1) of the apparently natural occurrence of a piebald white and natural coloured rat in Hong Kong raises the question of the frequency of the occurrence of albinism and melanism in nature.

Exact statistics of the occurrence of such aberrant forms may well prove of value to geneticists and students of evolutionary theory, but they are very hard to obtain. Black or white specimens of various animals are often recorded in the literature or find their way into collections, but visual observations are obviously biased by relative conspicuousness, and I know to my cost how often collectors select the unusual or extreme forms for skinning, to the detriment of estimates of relative abundance. It is likely however that many potentially valuable records are locked away in the notes or memories of workers whose business it is to make routine examinations of large numbers of animals.

When animals are collected not as specimens, but for destruction as pests, for bacteriological examination, and so on, the proportion of unusual specimens is likely to be truly representative of their natural frequency. I would appeal therefore to all those who have such information to publish it. A letter to this journal seems the appropriate medium.

Mr. Romer has kindly given me his figures, and I have extracted figures from unpublished records collected in Rangoon (2) and in Malaya. Negative evidence is often of as much value as positive, and so I have included rats of which no aberrations were observed, but only of those species of which several hundred have been seen. The records in the following table refer only to cases of melanism and albinism in rats.

TABLE

Species	Number examined	Aberrations
1. Data from J. D. Romer, Hong Kong, 1948 and 1949 <i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	328,400	1 piebald albino-normal, 1 other 'white rat' (? <i>R. norvegicus</i>) reported, but latter a doubtful record. Melanic specimens fairly frequent but numbers not recorded.
2. Unpublished data from Harrison and Woodville, Rangoon, 1945 <i>Bandicota bengalensis</i>	800	10 black
<i>R. exulans concolor</i>	1,200	1 with a ventral white patch none
3. Scrub Typhus Research Unit records, Selangor Malaya, 1948 and 1949 <i>R. rattus diardi</i>	3,717	no complete melanic or albino forms, but this rat is very variable and white or near white patches on the belly are frequent.
<i>R. rattus jalorensis</i>	863	none
<i>R. exulans concolor</i>	237	none

Species	Number examined	Aberrations
<i>R. mülleri</i>	171	none
<i>R. rajah</i>	135	none
<i>R. sabanus</i>	273	1 albino, fur uniform pale grey almost white, eyes and tail dark.

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MALAYA,
10th March 1950.

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REFERENCES

1. Romer J. D. (1949): Naturally occurring albinism in a specimen of *Rattus norvegicus* Berk. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.*, **48**: 579.
2. Harrison J. L. and Woodville H. C. (1948): An attempt to control house rats in Rangoon *Trans. R. Soc., trop. Med. Hyg.* **42**: 247-58.

9. 'SOORI PHANDA'

Commenting on Shri S. R. Daver's interesting article on the Soori Phanda method of killing tigers, Lt.-Col. R. W. Burton refers (p. 65 of Vol. 49) to the use of a spiked bamboo method in the 'Triangle' of Myitkyina district, Burma.

I showed the sketch of the Soori Phanda to my Kachin orderly, who comes from Nawngkai village 13 miles south-east of Fort Hertz, and he at once said that the Kachins of his tract, which can loosely be described as constituting the northern extremity of the 'Triangle', use almost identically the same method; normally bamboo spikes alone are used, without an iron spear-head at the tip.

If two trees are not readily available the Kachins tie the carcass on top of two poles which are then propped up in such a way that a tug at the carcass pulls away the prop; as the poles (which are about 2 feet apart) come crashing down the bamboo spikes come up between them and impale the tiger.

Lt.-Col. Burton goes on to say that the tiger is 'not particularly harmful to the human beings of those parts'. Tigers are in the habit of taking cattle, ponies, goats, sheep (brought over from the Nam Tamai) and pigs; in 1947 ten heads of cattle were taken from my orderly's village, a heavy loss for one small community. Man-eaters are not unknown. The flesh of the tiger is eaten (though not relished except by the Lisus) and the bones used to fetch 10 to 20 rupees a viss by sale to the local Chinaman. It is not surprising therefore that the Kachins do their best to destroy tigers.

'Hpalok makam' is the Kachin name for a Soori Phanda, and 'Masun' corresponds to 'Soori'.

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16th June, 1950.

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